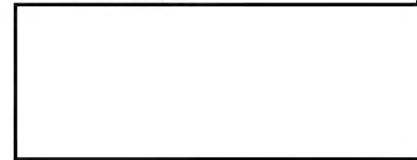


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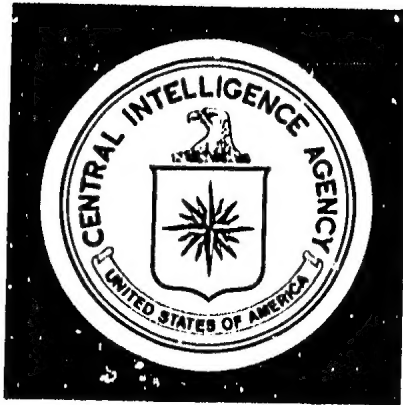
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## *Developments in Indochina*

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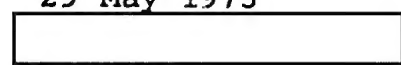
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CAMBODIA

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Keeping Up the War

Communist military pressure in the Phnom Penh region may extend well into the rainy season, which is already under way. The new military operations that started last week along the Mekong corridor southeast of the capital were coordinated attacks on both sides of the river near Neak Luong and farther north near the isolated provincial capital at Prey Veng. Elements of several Khmer Communist regiments may have been involved in these actions.

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These enemy operations initially cut off a few government units along Route 1 just southeast of Neak Luong and kept other government units in the Neak Luong area pinned down, but the Communist drive to "liberate" Neak Luong still does not have much momentum. Heavy air strikes have helped the Cambodians hold their ground and have added to the Khmer Communists' logistics and manpower problems. In the past few days Communist shellings and probes in the Neak Luong area have been limited. Even if they are unable to overrun Neak Luong, the Communists can be expected to sustain their harassing operations against the Mekong resupply convoys that move up the river from South Vietnam to Phnom Penh.

There are continuing indications that the Khmer Communists are laying the groundwork for operations against government positions closer to Phnom Penh.

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[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Whether the Khmer Communists can actually carry out a sustained offensive in this sector will depend heavily on logistic considerations and on their ability to coordinate sizable operations in the face of air strikes and increasingly heavy rains. Despite these handicaps the Khmer Communists seem determined to maintain the military initiative. [REDACTED]

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LAOS

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Negotiations: Isolating the Issues

It is now three months since the Lao cease-fire agreement was signed, and neither side is optimistic about the prospects of a new coalition government. The public dialogue is acrimonious, but Prime Minister Souvanna and senior Pathet Lao negotiator Phoumi Vongvichit meet frequently and appear to be making limited progress in isolating the areas of agreement and disagreement.

The Pathet Lao are currently focusing on:

- Distribution of Cabinet Portfolios: The Communists want an equal division of the most important ministries and are ruling out any reorganization of current ministries that would lessen the importance of Pathet Lao portfolios.
- National Political Coalition Council: The Pathet Lao insist that the Council be independent of the present National Assembly, have a say in the law-making process, and not be subject to dissolution by the King without approval of both sides.
- Neutralization of Vientiane and Luang Prabang: Either all Lac Army troops must withdraw from the two capitals or both sides must have equal numbers in the two cities.
- Deputy Prime Minister: The Communists want one of their own to be deputy prime minister and would like to see him become acting prime minister when Souvanna is absent or dies.

Compromise appears possible on all these issues. Souvanna, for example, recently said that he would not

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insist on selecting the deputy prime minister and added that the Communists themselves had already softened their demands on this issue. Compromise on military problems is another matter. The Communists show no sign of abandoning their tough stand, and Souvanna has recently been letting his military leaders know that he may have to make some concessions to get things moving.

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VIETNAM

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Senate Election Bill

President Thieu has proposed some amendments to the Senate election bill, but he has not tried to reinstate a provision that probably would have restricted all but the Democracy Party from putting up candidates. Thieu's changes, which are likely to be accepted by the National Assembly, restore a provision calling for the election of two 15-member slates rather than three 10-man slates, and increase the size of the deposit each slate must put up. The President did not put back a provision requiring that all slates be endorsed by a legal political party.

Although Thieu's action presumably will make it possible for candidates outside the government camp to participate in the Senate election, it is not clear how many will do so. There have been few signs of preparation for the contest thus far in Saigon political circles, and some potential candidates are still unhappy over the 15-man slates. They apparently believe that the relatively well-organized Democracy Party will have a better chance of electing two large slates than three smaller ones.

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ANNEX

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North Vietnam Sets Forth Broad  
Apologia on the Vietnam War

The North Vietnamese theoretical journal, *Hoc Tap*, has published a broad apologia for the regime's handling of the Vietnam war. The unusually candid article, which appeared in March, amounts to a defense of First Secretary Le Duan's policy of aggressive use of main-force tactics. The author, Hoang Tung, editor of the party daily *Nhan Dan* and an alternate central committee member, has written before on questions dealing with strategy in Vietnam.

Hoang Tung's central theme is that Hanoi had no choice but to mount an aggressive struggle because the confrontation between "socialists" and "imperialists" was so intense in Vietnam. Tracing the twists and turns of the early stages of the war, he claims that the revolution in the late 1950s was "in danger of being repulsed" and that the US had planned to invade North Vietnam. Thus the Vietnamese Communists had to "wage a bloody struggle." Apparently alluding to the on-going conflict between the advocates of lower-level guerrilla warfare and Le Duan's arguments for a broader offensive, the article said "the problem was whether to take the offensive or withdraw. Our people chose to attack...." This offensive, says Tung, "evolved into a revolutionary war."

Tung claims that the strategy was successful, and indeed, "the war would have ended if US troops had not entered it." He adds, however, that the entry of the US into the war on a larger scale "was something we had predicted." Faced in the mid-1960s with the alternative of main-force confrontation of US forces or guerrilla warfare, Hanoi again "immediately took the offensive." If it had done anything else, Tung says in rhetoric smacking strongly of Le Duan, "How long would we have to wait?"

Explaining the rationale for the 1968 offensive in terms reflecting Le Duan's line, Tung says Hanoi

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felt that by means of "major military efforts" it could force the US to "de-escalate if not end the war." At this point, he claims, the "art of war leadership reached a new stage of development... and the people of South Vietnam defeated the limited war strategy of the US."

President Nixon's election posed new problems for the Communists, according to the article. After the "formidable, all-encompassing challenge" of Vietnamization, Tung says, the US again "Americanized" the war in April 1972. The article attributes final "victory" to an intensified struggle, especially the main-force offensive that began in March 1972. In an unusually defensive tone, the article describes the Paris agreement as the "greatest victory we could win considering the actual balance of forces between us and the enemy."

Up to now Hanoi's propagandists have done little beyond referring vaguely to the political and military pressures that brought Hanoi to the negotiating table. Tung's detailed analysis of the regime's "correct" strategy over the years in order to justify the "victory" embodied in the Paris accord, is long overdue. If, as most Vietnamese Communists realize, Le Duan was the man behind last year's offensive, and if the Communists had to lower their sights last fall, is he not open to the charge that his aggressive approach had failed? Not so, answers Hoang Tung. Since the North had no choice from the beginning but to follow Le Duan's line, that line was "correct," even though the results were not everything that could be hoped for.

This line of reasoning provides the rationale for further main-force action. If "major military efforts" were responsible for Hanoi obtaining as much as it did, then "major military efforts" may be called for again. Hoang Tung does not suggest that such action is likely any time soon. In fact, his article seems designed to convey the message that having achieved its "victory"--in this case the expulsion of the US--Hanoi intends to pursue different tactics for some time.

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Whether Hoang Tung's comments are a response to internal criticism from high officials of the regime over failure to achieve some of Hanoi's original objectives in the South is not clear. At the least, the article fulfills what some North Vietnamese leaders felt was the need for a broad explanation to the rank and file of revised objectives--and at the same time put themselves on the back for their conduct of the war. [REDACTED]

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